

#COGNITIVE GROWTH

Toddlers get the idea of possibility

"These results are so interesting because they show that when children see events in the world that they can't explain, it instills in them a drive for information that they can use to reconcile their prior model of the world with what they've just seen," Feigenson says.



Children too young to know words like "impossible" and "improbable" still understand how possibility works, new research with 2- and 3-year-olds finds.

The findings, the first to demonstrate that young children distinguish between improbable and impossible events, and learn significantly better after impossible occurrences, appear in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

"Even young toddlers already think about the world in terms of possibilities," says co-author Lisa Feigenson, codirector of the Johns Hopkins University Laboratory for Child Development.

"Adults do this all the time and here we wanted to know whether even toddlers think about possible states of the world before they've had years of experience and before they have the language to describe these mental states."

Adults consider possibilities daily. Rain likely? Best, bring an umbrella. If I buy a lottery ticket, will I win? Probably not. But it wasn't known if toddlers also practice that mental judgement or if it emerges with age and experience.

2- and 3-year-old children were shown a gamball-type machine filled with toys. Some kids saw a mix of pink and purple toys. Others saw the machine was filled with only purple toys. Children then got a coin to drop into the machine to draw one toy.

The kids, who saw that a mix of pink and purple toys was available and drew a pink one, shouldn't have been surprised since even if there weren't that many pink ones, and even if there was only one pink one, there was some chance they'd get a pink toy. But some kids, who saw the machine filled with only purple toys, got a pink which shouldn't have been possible.

After they got their toys, all of the children were told the name of the toy, a made-up word, and then asked to think about whether things are possible or unlikely or just can't happen.



Vikram Doctor

On May 15, 1962, a Buddhist monk named Lobsang Jivaka passed away in the Civil Hospital in Dalhousie. He was 47 and his health had been poor for years, a consequence of inadequate nutrition and the rigours of the hard life that he had been leading in the hills with little money. His body was cremated according to Buddhist rites and there seems no marker of him left in India.

We know of Jivaka's death because a Buddhist nun named Sister Vajira sent a short note about it to his British publisher. That same year, Jivaka's book *Life of Milarepa* came out, a more accessible version of an earlier academic translation of the life of one of the most famous Tibetan yogis. Weeks before his death, another book of his, *Imji Getsul*, was published, whose subtitle 'An English Buddhist in a Tibetan Monastery' made his identity clear.

Or did it? The death notice in *The Times London* referred to him as 'formerly Dr Laurence M. Dillon of Britain, who became a Buddhist,' but anyone searching for him under that name would not have gone far. Before becoming Jivaka, he went by Michael Dillon, a medical doctor, who had been working on the carrying pilgrims from Malaysia to Mecca, and then cargo between India and the United States. But before that, long before, there had been Laura Dillon, the name and identity that he was given at birth but never felt he could accept. Dillon told the story about both his gender and spiritual journeys in *Out of the Ordinary*, a manuscript finished shortly before his death. It would not be published till 2016, possibly due to the efforts to suppress it, by his brother, Sir Robert Dillon, heir to a baronetcy in Ireland. Ultimately, the manuscript was made available for two books that tell Dillon's story in ways that complement each other.

Liz Hodgkinson's *From a Girl to a Man: How Laura Became Michael* is an efficient assembling of what is known of Dillon's life, including photos that document his transition from a Girl Guide in the beach town of Folkestone, where he was raised by his aunts, to a sporty-looking student at Oxford University, to an androgynous 'poker-faced' persona while working as a mechanic during World War II, to a handsome man with a smiling face again, after transitioning to Michael Dillon, and his final photo as a monk, looking gaunt yet at peace.

Pagan Kennedy's *The First Man-Made Man* is a more imaginative re-telling of Dillon's life, focusing on the loneliness of years of living in a gender limbo, sure about not being a woman, but unable to become a man. Dillon experimented with lesbian relationships at Oxford, but as Kennedy writes, to have sex with a woman, she would have to strip off her blazer and the bindings on her chest, until she was naked and female, her lover would have desired exactly what Laura hated about her body.

Scientific Progress

Others had felt this way before, as is shown by the many stories of people identified as women at birth, who later in life passed as soldiers, sailors or in other professions that were exclusively male-identified in their era. Indian mythology has characters like *Shikhandi*, who seem to cross gender boundaries, while Christian traditions have stories like that of *St. Marina*, the Monk, whose devotion led her to becoming a monk, with the secret only coming to light after death. But while a life led as a man was possible, changing to a man's body was not.

For Dillon, born in 1915, that possibility came to exist. A few years before he was born, an Austrian physiologist, Eugen Steinach, established that ovaries and testicles produce different chemicals, which cause gender

changes in the body. This triggered huge interest, not only in using hormones, as these chemicals were called, to change gender, but also to rejuvenate sexual vigour. Then, as now, the urges of ageing men have always been a potent driver of change and being *Steinached* became a verb, as the rich and famous, WB Yeats, Sigmund Freud and others, were operated on to revive their energy.

Kennedy suggests the operation, which was essentially a vasectomy, just had a powerful placebo effect. The real stimulus provided by Steinach was to endocrinology, which developed rapidly in the interwar years. In 1935, testosterone was isolated and a way to produce it was developed, earning the scientists behind it the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1939. Dillon learned about it while researching his condition and may have become the first person to start taking testosterone for the purpose of gender transition.

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Hounded around the world, the first 'man-made man' took refuge in India

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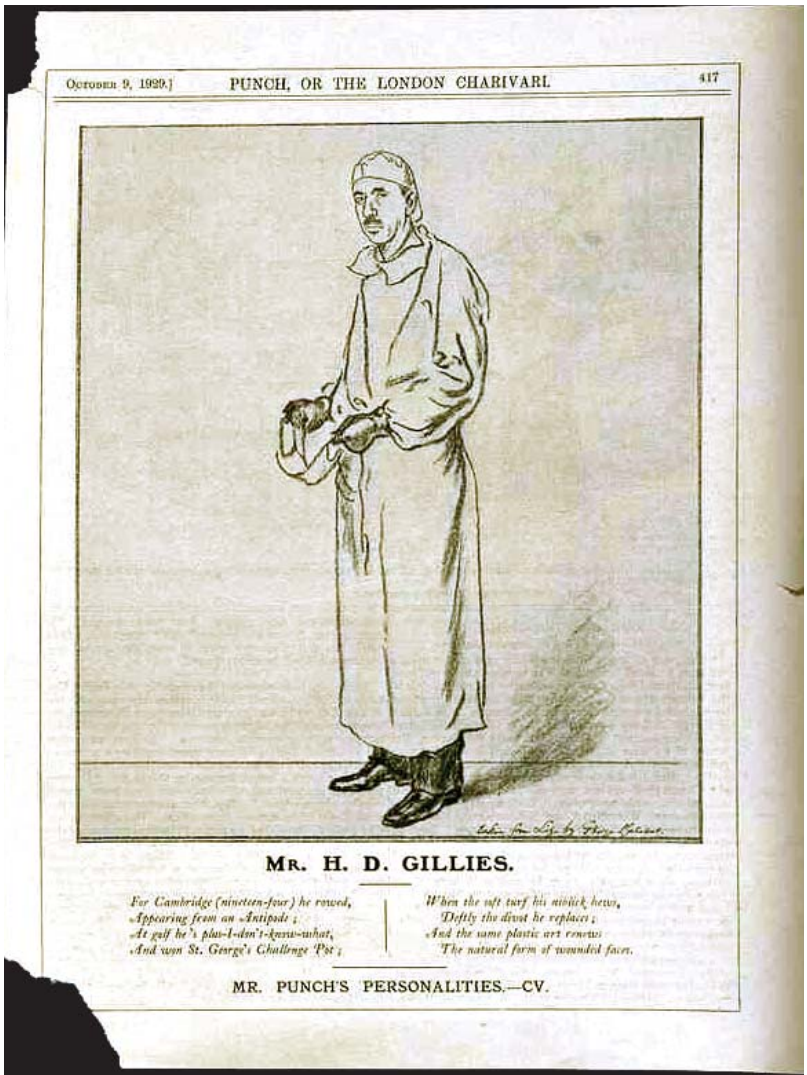
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accepted therapy for trans people and also the source of immense controversy and, haphazardly, ammunition for political attacks.

The interwar years also saw rapid growth in plastic surgery, the other medical field that would come to define gender change. The horrific injuries inflicted in World War I led surgeons like Harold Gillies to explore ways to reconstruct faces and minimise scars. In the 1920s, this became cosmetic surgery, making Gillies one of the best-paid surgeons of his time, and also giving him the freedom to experiment with applying plastic surgery to other problems in the body.

One of these was hypospadias, malformations of the penis, which sometimes caused babies to be identified and raised as female. This was not quite the same as Dillon's case, since such cases tended to result in much more obviously masculine physiognomies, but it made plastic surgeons open to ideas of gender transitioning. In 1942, Dillon had an accident, which led to him being treated by a doctor who had worked with Gillies. Dillon felt able to open up to him about his condition and, almost miraculously, he received not just sympathy, but an offer to perform a double mastectomy and then a referral to Gillies for further examination.



A caricature of Harold Gillies in 'Punch' magazine. He conducted a gender-affirming surgery on Dillon.

#TRANSGENDER RIGHTS

Throughout Dillon's life, doctors were among the few who tended to be supportive, understanding his view that he suffered from a medical problem that needed correction. Gillies devised a new technique, phalloplasty, where skin flaps harvested from Dillon's body were fashioned into the equivalent of a penis that was grafted onto his clitoris and channelled the urinary tract.

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The sympathetic treatment that Dillon received from doctors, might have resulted in his own decision to qualify as one, even though, he was a decade older than most other students. He enrolled in Trinity College, Dublin, a prestigious medical school, although going back to Ireland brought him close to his family home and the brother who refused to accept him as a man. Dillon dutifully kept his distance, but resentment over this may have laid the seed for the one act that would ultimately expose him.

Political Targets

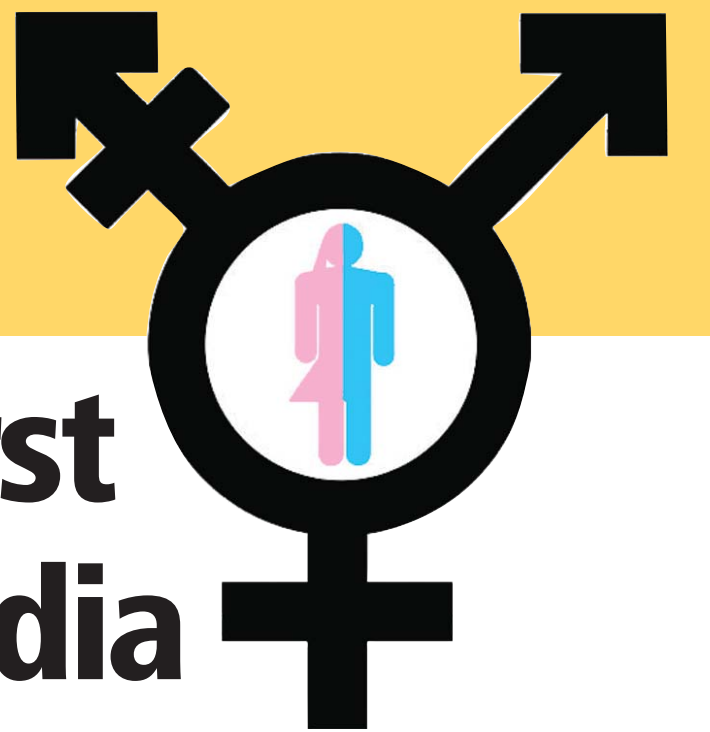
Of all the horrors of the recent US presidential campaign, among the worst was the targeting of transgender people to stir up passions then directed to political ends. The depressing success of this tactic means that it will now be replicated across the world. But no one should imagine that transgender people will give in. As the histories of people like Dillon tell us, the compulsions driving them to transition will transcend the hostility they receive. Anyone who thinks that transitioning is just a fad should consider the double violence trans people face, disdain from the world outside coupled with the internal blow of waking up every day and feeling and seeing in the mirror that their body is just wrong. Having to deal with the latter gives the strength to deal with the former.

It is worth examining though as to why the political tactic is proving so successful now. One reason might be the differing ways in



Bruce Lee's birthday

Bruce Lee was a famous martial artist and movie star who changed how people saw Asian actors and martial arts. Born in San Francisco on November 27, 1940, he grew up in Hong Kong. As a kid, he started acting in movies and learning martial arts. As he grew up, Bruce Lee did many great things. He made a new type of martial arts called Jeet Kune Do. He was one of the first Asian people to be the main character in Hollywood movies.



brave it out, but now he knew that the story would follow him, wherever he went in the world.

Fresh Start

This was what made him decide to disappear into India. On the City of Bath's return voyage, it passed Calcutta, and Dillon disembarked there. In his years sailing, he had become increasingly interested in spiritual issues and was drawn to Buddhism. Now, in the land where Buddha came from, he could make a fresh start, studying Buddhism and aspiring to be a monk. Evading his story was impossible in the West, but in the crowds and spaces of the East, it might happen.

Dillon's mistake points to why transmen have now been targeted. Aspiring to masculine privilege can be understood, except when it seems to encroach on the rights of 'natural born' men. An aristocratic system, built on male primogeniture, is threatened when a woman becomes a man. And at a time when male insecurities are being cynically manipulated by social media influencers and politicians for their own gain, it is easy to make transmen seem like a further threat, yet another way in which the rights of the allegedly fragile male gender are being undermined, both by women assuming male privilege

in the United Kingdom, and risked making his case to the editor to change his entry for the Dillon Baronetcy, where Laura was still listed as the sister, into a brother named Michael. Surprisingly, the editor was sympathetic and said that he would have the change made and, crucially, would back Dillon, if he claimed the title after his brother's death. He also assured Dillon that the other directory, Burke's Peerage, would follow suit.

Dillon had already managed to change his name and gender identification in most other official records, so, it is possible that he saw this as just completing the process. But this was his big mistake. Burke's didn't follow suit, and continued to list a sister named Laura for the Dillon Baronetcy, and in 1958, a journalist noticed the discrepancy (It says something about British journalists that they would find time and purpose in combing and comparing records of minor aristocrats.) Journalists promptly pursued Sir Robert Dillon, who had no compunction in exposing his sibling and disclosing his whereabouts.

This was on a ship. Dillon had started working as the medical officer on ships, liking the travel and the rule-bound (and masculine) world of ships. At that time, he was on the City of Bath, a ship with Ellerman Lines that did the India-to-US cargo route. It was when it was docking in Baltimore that he received a telegram from the *Daily Express* that read, "Do you intend to claim the title since your change-over? Kindly cable Daily Express." A crew member came to tell him that there were two reporters waiting on the quay.

Dillon felt his world collapsing. The first thing he did was reveal his story to the captain and the other ship officers, who were surprisingly accepting. He also refused to meet the reporters, but they evidently spilled the story to the Baltimore Sun, which had an item the next day with the title, EX-WOMAN (NOW MAN) IN LINE FOR PEERAGE. Dillon had to speak to the reporters then and tried to



Michael Dillon.

which transmen and transwomen are being targeted. Historically, transphobia was primarily directed against transwomen who were seen to betray dominant ideals of masculinity. Transwomen also tend to stand out more because of the transitions that testosterone works during puberty, creating features like a more prominent Adam's Apple and larger hands. Transitioning after puberty makes it harder to conceal these features, making it easier to identify, and mock transwomen.

Transmen tend to find it easier to pass, and most did just that in earlier decades. (Some trans people have always rejected passing for reinforcing the idea of a strict gender binary, and this is now perhaps on the rise.) Kennedy writes that those few transsexual men, who did exist in the sixties, seemed to have a talent for disappearing into the mainstream, for joining the three-piece-suit march of executives along the sidewalk. At a time when male privilege was almost unquestioned, it seemed natural, even to transphobes, that someone would desperately want to be a man. "To transform into a man was to suddenly be pegged at a higher value," writes Kennedy.

There were situations, like inheritance, where this higher value became agonisingly tangible. The system of entails, for example, in British law bound an estate to only certain types of heirs, usually legitimately born sons. Daughters could expect to receive nothing, and even be evicted from the family home after the death of their father. This is the financial reason driving the desperation to find husbands in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and also behind the more recent *Downton Abbey*. Families with only daughters have occasionally flirted with transitioning as a solution. In a recent interview in *The Times*, Anne Tennant, Baroness Glenconner, an aristocrat close to the royal family, admitted that she once asked her father, the Earl of Leicester, if she could become a man, just to prevent his title and estates going to a cousin.

Dillon may have tried to do just that. His brother, the 8th Baronet, had no children, so the title would end on his death, but if Dillon was accepted as a man, he could inherit it. In 1953, Dillon landed up at the office of Debrett's Peerage, one of the two main directories that chronicled aristocratic ranks and fami-

also making it ever easier to spread misconceptions.

This has combined with a new tactic to target transwomen, through their participation in female sports and access to female spaces, ranging from toilets to prisons. This was never seen as important in past decades because female sports and spaces were not seen as important to begin with. Decades of activism from women's rights activists have made these spaces, and sports, important, and it has proven shatteringly easy to suggest that they are at risk from transwomen, even if the people making these suggestions are, in large part, those who were never supporters of women at all.

All concerns about change are not automatically equivalent to transphobia. It might be fair to say that some trans activists underestimate the level of dissonance, that trans issues would have, among people who had never thought about them, much less known a trans person and understood their challenges. In any social movement, there is a need for dialogue and engagement to change attitudes, and then real change can happen surprisingly fast. But the greater visibility of trans issues has come at a time when social media makes such direct contact harder, while Dillon's exposure, it was Barrow, who wrote explaining how it had happened.

Dillon's life demonstrates this. Kennedy and Hodgkinson's books document how, for all the prejudices he faced, he also made many allies along the way, the doctors who helped him transition, the ship crew who stood by him after he was exposed, and many others, who were willing to accept something as strange then as a man who had been a woman, simply because they had got to know the man first, and that was what mattered.

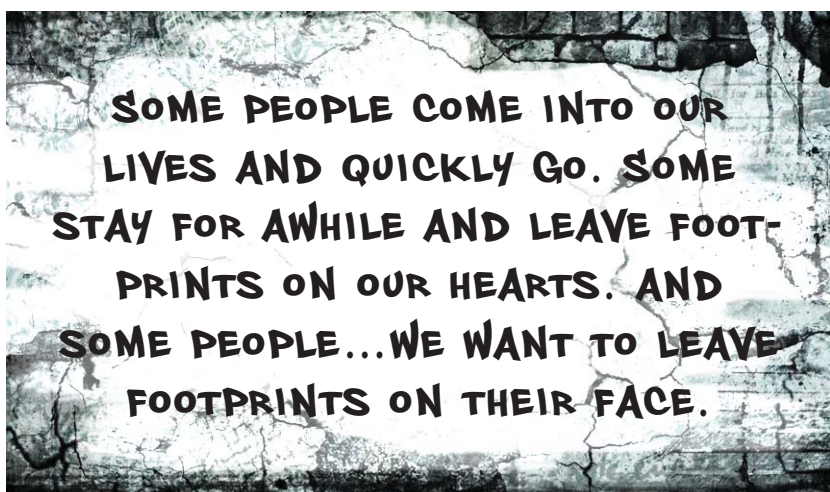
During the war, Dillon worked in a garage alongside a teenage boy, Gilbert Barrow, and finally told him about his history just before Barrow was called up for the navy. Kennedy writes that Barrow said that he had known at once and had told the garage hands that this friend was as much a man as any of them, which baffled the tormentors." After Dillon's exposure, it was Barrow, who wrote explaining how it had happened.

India and Buddhism allowed Dillon some escape, but only for a while. Sooner or later, wherever he was, the story of his history would emerge, causing problems and forcing him to move on. Only once, in a remote monastery in Ladakh in 1960, did he seem to be approaching the total escape that he longed for. But in that era, the fear of Chinese aggressions made Ladakh a highly inaccessible territory. With the help of Kushok Bakula, the Ladakhi leader, after whom Leh airport is named, he was able to get a three-month entry permit, but once that was over, he had to leave and the Indian bureaucracy never let him return.

Dillon was still hoping to return to Ladakh in those last years that he spent in the hills. He was almost destitute by then, having given up a fairly substantial inheritance that he had received from the aunts who raised him, as part of his vow of poverty as a monk. In 1961, when he was living in the Maha Bodhi Society hostel in Sarnath, he received a shock when a local Hindi paper ran an article that said that the monk Jivaka had once been a 'lady doctor.' He could only speculate who had released the news and where he could fee now.

But then, Kennedy writes, something surprising happened. "None of his friends around town mentioned it. No other newspaper picked it up. Perhaps, the story had sunk into obscurity because it had appeared in a dusty little newspaper with few English-speaking readers. Whatever the reason, Dillon felt as if he'd miraculously been spared." When *Life of Milarepa* and *Imji Getsul* appeared next year, there was no mention of Laura, or even Michael Dillon. We do not know if the monks and nuns, who may have been with him in the hospital at Dalhousie, and who did his cremation rites, knew or cared. In life, we might think the issue of gender matters, but in death, it makes no difference at all.

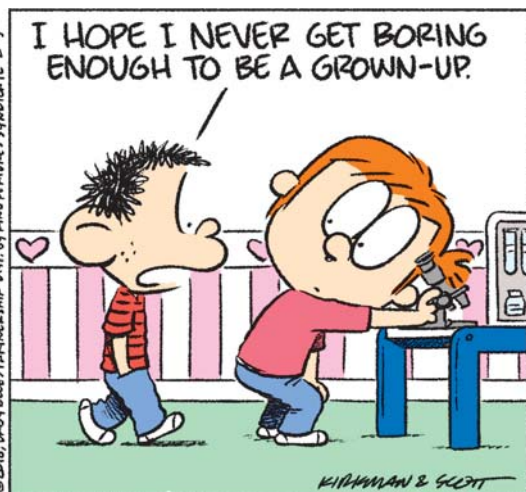
THE WALL



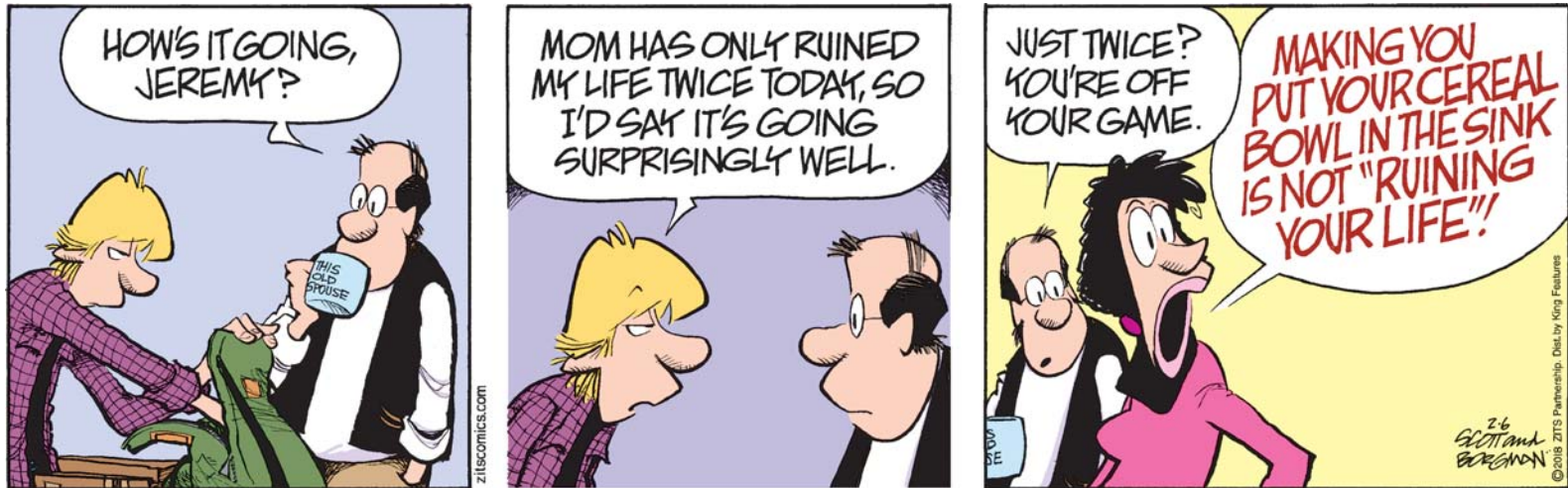
BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman